

Notes on Greek Theater

Pre-reading: Sophocles' *Antigone*

So How Did This Greek Tragedy Stuff All Begin??

- Greek theater began in 534 B.C. in the city of Dionysia;
- Festivals were held every Spring to honor the god Dionysus (*Dion-eye-sus*), the god of wine and fertility;
- The festivals consisted of wine, acting, singing and dancing.



Who was Thespis?

➤ Thespis was the **Father of Drama**;



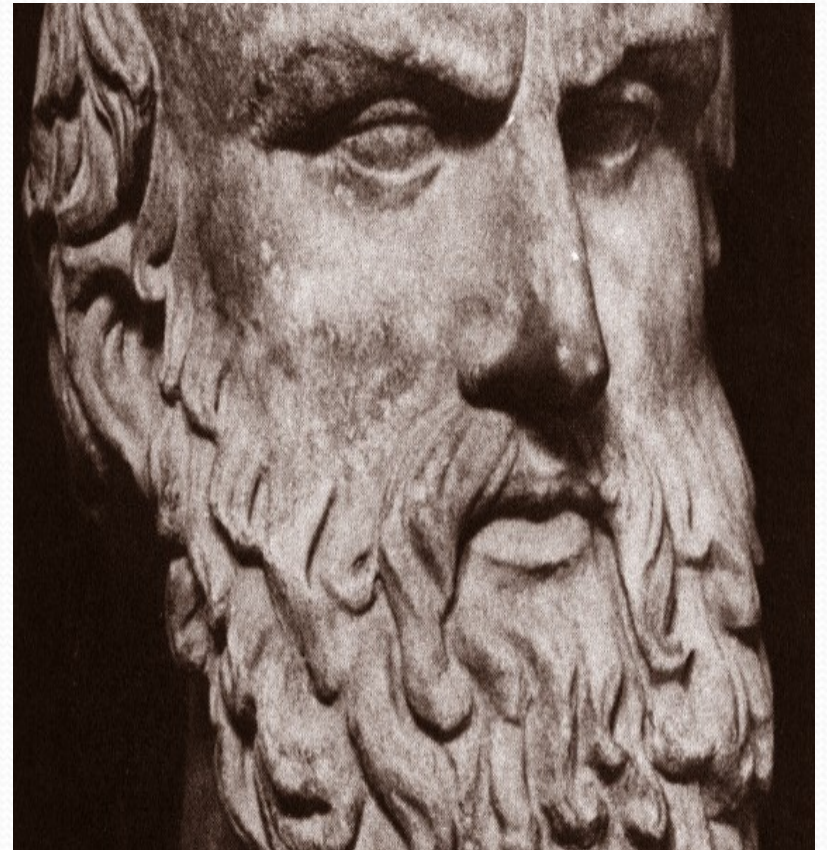
➤ He won the first drama prize in 535 B.C. for his acting;

➤ Thespis introduced the idea of the **first actor on stage**;

➤ His name is where we get the term **“thespians”**, which means “actors”.

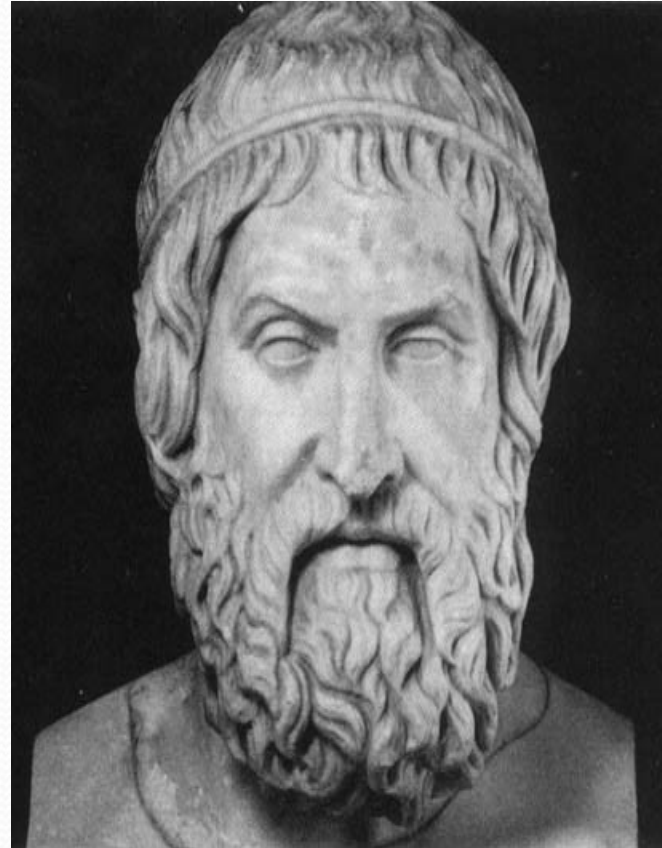
Who was Aeschylus?

- Introduced **second actor**;
- Encouraged **face to face conflict** with characters;



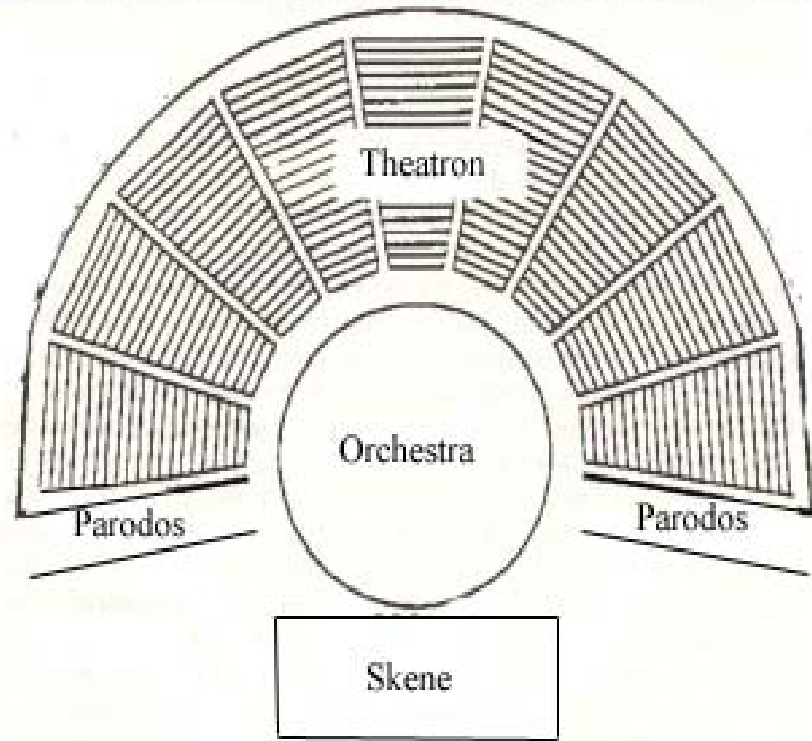
Sophocles

- Playwright of the play *Antigone*;
- Introduced painted scenery.



Structure of the Greek Theater

- **Theatron**: “seeing place”; audience sits here
- **Orchestra**: where actors and chorus performed
- **Thymele**: altar in center of orchestra honoring Dionysus
- **Skene**: dressing room; backstage
- **Parados**: entrance/exit to stage used by the chorus



Parts of a Greek Theater

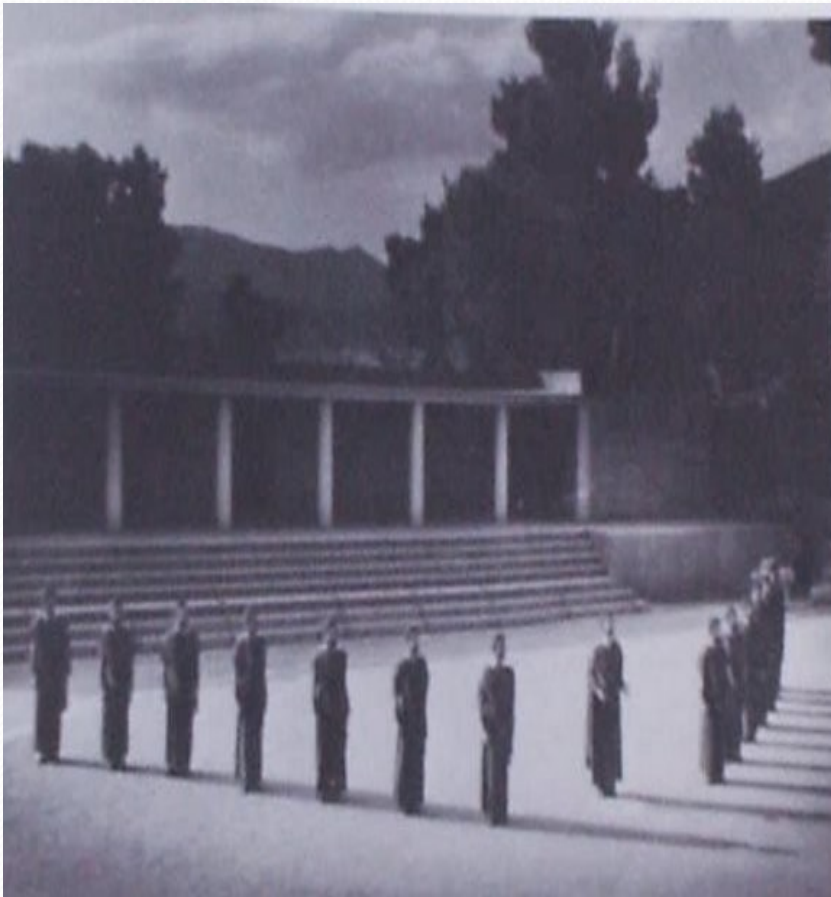
Greek Theater Continued...

- Some held up to **20,000 spectators!**





The Chorus



- **Function of chorus was to give information to the audience;**
- **They acted like a “curtain” and divided up the scenes/acts;**
- **Everything the chorus stated was sung.**

The Choragus

- A wealthy patron,
- pays for the cost of the production;
- Like the “producer”/direct or



Actors & Costumes

- All actors were male; females not permitted to act;
- Actors wore long, padded clothing with high boots/various colors;
- Actors moved very stiffly/dramatically
- Costumes showed your **status** in society.



Greek Masks

- Masks identified actor's
 - *AGE*
 - *GENDER*
 - *EMOTIONS*
- Masks had elaborate eyes and mouths;



Theater...

- ❑ Chorus always “chiming in”; distracting
- ❑ No breaks or intermissions;
- ❑ No lighting; no curtain;
- ❑ Rain or shine;
- ❑ Violence shown, but a “**messenger**” would appear on stage before this violent scene to warn all women and children.



ODE

- Long, often elaborate poem dealing with a serious subject matter
- Example: “Ode to a Mouse”
 - This was the poem where Steinbeck got the title for his play Of Mice and Men

Prologue

- the action or a set of introductory speeches **before** the first entry of the Chorus.

Exodus

- the last piece of a Greek tragedy;
- **exit** of all the actors



Tragic Hero

- the character who makes an **error** of judgment or a mistake that brings on a tragedy



Tragic Flaw

- the tragic hero's mistake or error in judgment



HAMARTIA

- Is when the hero realizes his mistake, but realizes it's **too late!**

So...

- **Tragic flaw** is simply the hero's mistake
- **Hamartia** is when they realize it is too late to fix this mistake!

CATHARSIS

- Release of emotions



Hubris

- Extreme *arrogance or pride*
- usually causes the tragic hero to **NOT** see his error in judgment